

March 15, 2007

Senate Judiciary Committee
Chairman Jesse Laslovich
Members of the Committee

My name is Ramona Ehnes and I am from Great Falls. I come before you wearing two hats today. First, as the President and on behalf of the Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association, we are asking for your support for HB 305, limiting liability for OHV activities. This is very important to the future of OHV opportunities in Montana.

Second, is a personal plea. In 1971, my husband and I along with several other friends purchased 160 acres in the Missouri River Breaks below Moroney Dam near Great Falls specifically for a place to go trail bike ride and camp. This was a huge stretch for us at that time. We all made monthly payments to pay for "the place". This area contains about 30 miles of cow and game trails that have provided a riding area for us. For many years we have all taken a number of our friends along to enjoy riding the area. We've picnicked, fished, camped, spent a Thanksgiving day and had several Easter egg hunts over the years.

My two sons grew up riding there with their friends. They rode in the evenings after work and weekends before the heat of summer. They have all grown up and now have families that ride there as well.

Times and attitudes have changed from those early days. The threat of possible litigation has my husband worried that we could lose everything we've worked all those years for simply by letting someone ride there. Now we are faced with my grandson wanting to ride with his friends on the land that will someday be his. How can I in good conscience tell my grandson that he cannot enjoy this with his friends? What can I do to convince my husband that we should take this risk?

While Montana Code provides protection for a long list of recreational uses, and some say that OHV use is covered, but by the absence of OHV's in the long list appears to me to be excluded. I don't want to be the test case to see if who is right. While everyone is entitled to their day in court, I don't want mine. Win or loose, the expense and emotional loss are just too great.

Please vote yes to pass this bill. Private property owners as well as the OHV community needs and deserves this bill.

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